DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY ZISCHKE DATE 1/26
XDS or XDS EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS
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October 30, 1951

Mr. Watts:

I venture the opinion that the problem concerning colonial imperialism and nationalism submitted by Mr. Niemeyer, to which your memorandum of October 23 refers, is not as difficult a factor in American policy as it might appear to be. I base that opinion on the following arguments:

The "emotional", or "sentimental", or "sense of justice" impulses alluded to by Mr. Niemeyer which impel many Americans to oppose "imperialistic rule" and sympathize with aspirations for independence rest upon the very foundation of our own national being. It would be a political impossibility for any foreign policy of ours to thrive which consistently departed from the Declaration of Independence concept of these matters. Our general course is charted, and deviations from it must be clearly justified by immediate considerations of paramount importance to our national interest.

Colonial imperialism, as a modern political phenomenon, is obviously nearing its end. America, India, and Indonesia, have emerged from it, and it would be a strange development indeed should we participate on a general or censorious policy basis in any effort to restrain the smaller and weaker areas from following their example.

I do not recall my history clearly enough to say whether the argument was used in England that the American colonies were not ready in the nineteenth century for self-government, and would be unable to maintain order, conduct administration, and extend protection. Certainly such considerations carried little weight in the plans and endeavors of the

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American patriots--and it may be presumed with equal certainty that they do not weigh heavily in the calculations of the peoples of areas now seeking freedom. Moreover, there are no accepted criteria of which I am aware with which to appraise and measure the relative importance to a political society of the elements cited and freedom. Despite the imperfections that have marred some of the small nations of this Hemisphere (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, as examples) they do function as states and are not greatly the losers when compared with Jamaica, or French Guiana, or even Puerto Rico.

Our policy during the period described by Mr. Niemeyer as "the liquidation of imperialism" should, I would suggest, be based upon the general premise of the right of self-determination and the particular ground of our national interest. We have proclaimed the first for over a century and a half, and no honest reproach or dangerous repercussion should result from our failure to uphold it in any instance where paramount considerations of the second category exist. Obviously, so long as present world tensions prevail, our national interest is closely bound to precisely those countries which still, to greater or lesser degree, carry the "stigma" of colonial imperialism.* When these tensions safely subside, other considerations will become valid.

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* There is a subsidiary problem involving simple colonial holdings (e.g. Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands) affecting the aspirations of third powers, which merits examination.

S/P:WThurston:vh

Re: PWatts memo to Staff 10-23-51

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